

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
U.S. COAST GUARD
STATEMENT OF
COMMODORE PETER W. MELERA
ON THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S 1994
PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE LAWS RELATING TO
THE COAST GUARD AUXILIARY
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEBRUARY 14, 1995

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to have this opportunity to meet with you and the other distinguished members of this Subcommittee to discuss the proposed legislation to amend the laws relating to the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary.

As the elected National Commodore of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary, I represent nearly 36,000 volunteers. We have men and women in every state and territory who offer their services, their vessels, their aircraft, and their radio facilities to the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard Auxiliary, created by Congress in 1939, is a non-military organization of civilian volunteers, dedicated to assisting its parent service in boating safety and other missions. Members of the Auxiliary not only donate their services, but also their personal resources, including boats, aircraft and radio stations to assist the Coast Guard. In 1994, the Auxiliary provided approximately 7,700 operational vessels, 200 aircraft and over 2,500 radio stations to support various Coast Guard missions.

Although the Auxiliary was originally created 56 years ago to assist the Coast Guard during World War II, the organization has evolved over the years into a valuable resource capable of providing low cost assistance to the parent service in many of its various peacetime missions. In addition to the many hours Auxiliarists spend in direct support of the Coast Guard, they also spend considerable individual time and effort training and qualifying themselves to perform their various missions.

The Auxiliary presently has over 11,600 instructors who teach boating safety education courses to the public, over 9,200 vessel examiners who perform voluntary safety inspections on recreational boats and more than 16,700 qualified boat crew and coxswains who provide safety patrols, search & rescue and other on-the-water support missions for the Coast Guard. In addition, approximately 450 Auxiliary pilots and over 800 qualified air observers also provide support to the Coast Guard.

Last year, the Auxiliary taught over 315,000 public education course students (including school children, teenagers and adults), provided courtesy marine safety examinations to more than 245,000 recreational boats, conducted more than 40,000 safety, regatta and aids to navigation patrols and conducted more than 42,000 Coast Guard operational support missions. The more than 500,000 hours spent by Auxiliarists patrolling the Nation's waterways resulted in 380 lives saved, 23,584 persons assisted and \$172,710,000 worth of property assisted or saved.

The Auxiliary, in recent years, has undergone considerable change, molding itself into the high quality organization that it is today. In 1984, the Coast Guard required all boat crew members to requalify under a new boat crew training program nearly identical with that required of active duty and reserve personnel. As a result, today all Auxiliary vessels are manned by highly competent, trained and certified crews. Operational responsibility for the Auxiliary Aviation Program is increasingly being transferred to Coast Guard Air Stations, thus providing the Auxiliary aviation component with the opportunity to work directly with their parent service counterparts.

Auxiliary training has also undergone dramatic changes in other areas as well with a complete revision of the basic qualification course requirements and a new instructors course, which requires several class presentations and evaluations in order to become a qualified instructor. The courtesy marine examination program has been expanded to include the marine dealer visitation program and commercial fishing vessel safety inspections by Auxiliarists who meet the same standards as active duty and reserve examiners.

Auxiliary officers must pass additional training courses to be eligible for office. In addition, the Auxiliary has recently developed and published its second generation of leadership training courses. All of these are in addition to the annual flotilla and division officer courses conducted by most districts each year. With the advent of the Auxiliary management objective

system in 1988, Auxiliary unit leaders have been charged with the responsibility of carrying out missions assigned to them by the Coast Guard District Commander in all areas of authorized Auxiliary activities.

Over the years, Auxiliarists not only have stood watches at Coast Guard units but have become qualified and, at many active duty units, serve to augment active duty boat crews. Auxiliarists and their vessels have joined with active duty and reserve Coast Guard units in providing presidential security and security for dignitaries from around the world. Auxiliarists have augmented Coast Guard forces for America's Cup, the Olympics, OPSAIL in New York, Boston and Philadelphia as well as other major spectator events throughout the country. Auxiliary programs and training continue to expand with newly assigned aids to navigation and marine environmental protection duties.

The Auxiliary provides an extremely cost-effective resource for the Coast Guard in a period of expanding missions and shrinking budgets. A recent internal study indicates that the value of Auxiliary services is in excess of \$40,000,000.00 annually and the value of Auxiliary vessels, aircraft and radio units offered for use to the parent service is approximately \$350,000,000.00. Although the Auxiliary is a part-time resource, available to assist and augment the Coast Guard, its ability to act as a force multiplier is extremely valuable during surge periods resulting from natural disasters, environmental catastrophes, major marine

events and for home front duties when international incidents require the deployment of active duty Coast Guard resources. In order for the Auxiliary to remain a viable and cost-effective resource for the Coast Guard, the present statutory framework governing the Coast Guard Auxiliary, which has been in existence for more than 50 years, substantially unchanged, must be updated.

A significant number of Auxiliary members have been reluctant to take part in various authorized activities for fear of putting their personal assets at risk in the event of litigation that might arise out of the performance of their authorized missions. While, over the years there have been only a handful of lawsuits brought against Auxiliarists, and all of these have arisen out of operational activities while under Coast Guard orders, we live in an increasingly litigious society. The Auxiliary and its members need protection while performing their authorized duties. These coverages are prerequisites for the continued growth and ability of the Auxiliary and its members to continue their support of varying Coast Guard missions.

The expanded missions of the Auxiliary are reflective of today's environment, in which organizations must have the ability to assume a wide variety of activities, in order to keep pace with a changing world. The original statute setting forth a limited purpose for the Auxiliary has served its purpose, but its time has passed, and now the Auxiliary must be positioned to assist the Coast Guard as requested by the Commandant. Your speedy

passage of this legislation will enable the Auxiliary to keep pace with its parent service, the United States Coast Guard, and continue to live up to the Auxiliary motto "A proud tradition, a worthy mission".

I will be happy to respond to any questions which you or the other members of the Subcommittee might have.